



# TX Sense Abilities

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NEWS & VIEWS

## **DBS Transition Services: Successfully Serving Younger Consumers**

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*Abstract: In this article Assistant Commissioner Madrigal looks back on the past 10 years of changes in the Transition Program.*

*Key Words: Division for Blind Services, Transition, visual impairment, career exploration*

For more than 20 years, DARS / Division for Blind Services (DBS) has maintained strong and innovative Transition Services, which endeavors to partner with eligible students and their families in order to assist with the transition from school to post-school life and employment. A little more than 10 years ago, DBS made the decision to lower its minimum age for the services from 14 to 10 years of age.

The rationale for this decision can be attributed to two factors. First, it is our agency's philosophy that it's never too early to start thinking about and planning for life after high school. It's vital to begin asking questions and exploring options for possibilities in the areas of independent living, post-secondary training, employment, and additional supports if needed. Additionally, it's also important to explore these options in light of the young person's hopes, dreams, motivations, interests, and capabilities. This multi-year process is intended to be student led, and DBS Transition Counselors strive to partner with the student (and parent or guardian) to provide and coordinate appropriate services that will facilitate effective transitioning from school toward an employment outcome. For example, below are some areas of focus for DBS Transition Counselors working with students in a multi-year process.

### **Elementary School**

- Assist students with their development of self-awareness and work awareness.
- Begin vocational assessment to assist the student in developing interpersonal skills and decision-making skills.
- Provide opportunities for learning about vocations and careers.
- Provide training and opportunities for development of independent living skills.

### **Middle School**

- Assess interests, aptitudes, work habits, and career maturity.
- Begin occupational exploration and encourage participation in World of Work activities.

- Increase personal responsibility and independent living responsibilities.

## High School

- Continue to focus on career exploration via World of Work activities and practical work experiences.
- Increase the student's job seeking skills such as interviewing, personal data sheet, etc.
- Evaluate student performance at the work site or through work sample.
- Increase the student's involvement in the community each year working toward the objective of having their living arrangements, post-secondary training options, and employment goal clearly identified by graduation from high school and / or dismissal from special education services.

Second, the decision to lower the minimum age for Transition services to age 10 allows for greater resources and expanded services to reach more students and families. The DBS Transition Services is a subset of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program, which has a majority of its funding provided by the federal government. On the other hand, the DBS Children's Program has budgets that are more limited due to the fact that it is primarily funded via state general revenue funds. Access to these federal VR funds facilitates an expansion of services as our Transition Services has the means to assist with providing and purchasing low vision devices / physical restoration services, pre-teen vocational assessments, specialized group skills activities and trainings, additional World of Work experiences, and other services that address the development of prevocational and daily living skills.

As we look back over the past decade, we can recognize that the decision to lower the age for Transition Services was a good one. The first students who started in the services at age 10 are now in their early twenties. There are some who are currently in the process of completing secondary education and being dismissed from special education services with a coordinated plan to begin supported employment services. There are others who are currently engaged in a myriad of post-secondary training programs, including college, vocational or technical school, and other certificate programs. Others have found meaningful work after high school or continue to work with one of our adult VR counselors in pursuit of a successful employment outcome.

The DBS Transition Services remains committed to partnering with young people from age 10 to 23. Without exception, the needs and barriers of students who are blind or visually impaired are unique and may require a multi-year plan of services to address issues related to adjustment to vision loss, independent living, communication skills, independent travel skills, support systems, and vocational skills. DBS was the first and is still one of the very few state VR agencies in the country that serve transition-age students at such a young age, and this effort will continue to assist and facilitate effective transitioning for students who are blind / visually impaired in Texas.

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